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Bureau of Rehabilitation Services 2007-2008 Highlights

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Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

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Bureau of Rehabilitation Services



2007 – 2008

Highlights

MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF
LABOR

Maine Department of Labor

Mission

The Maine Department of Labor is committed to serving Maine workers and businesses by:

- Assisting individuals, families and communities when jobs are lost;
- Helping people prepare for and find jobs;
- Protecting workers on the job; and
- Researching and analyzing employment data to support job growth.

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# Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

## Mission

***The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services works to provide full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities.***

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	1
Revenues and Expenditures.....	2
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.....	3
Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired.....	5
Division of Deafness.....	7
Americans with Disabilities Act.....	8
Challenges Before Us.....	9
Organizational Chart.....	11
Office Locations & Phone Numbers.....	12

Bureau Director's Message

"The world is moved not only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

Helen Keller



Jill Duson, Director
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Mainers with disabilities dream of being employed and living independently, of being welcomed and respected as the heroes and honest workers whose efforts help move the world. Yet, according to Cornell University in 2007, only 38.6% of working-age Mainers with disabilities were employed, as compared to 83.3% of their non-disabled peers.

Maine, with its current budgetary crisis, demographics of its aging workforce and its slow population growth, will only prosper if all its residents, including those with disabilities, are actively involved in its present and future. This is a challenge and an opportunity not to be missed.

Through its direct service and advocacy programs, the core mission of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) at the Maine Department of Labor is to help people with disabilities to achieve their dreams and become fully participating community members.

As the national economy weakens, BRS has fallen on lean times. As funding is decreasing, the demand for and the cost of services continue to grow. These very real challenges and opportunities require that we continuously examine and adjust how we do our work and steward the resources that we manage.

BRS has taken full advantage of the two years since we first published a BRS Highlights Report to fundamentally examine our processes and implement improved systems controls. Specifically, the Bureau has implemented comprehensive programmatic and process changes that integrate operational improvements in case management, fiscal oversight and quality assurance systems to allow us to increasingly do more with less.

This publication is intended to provide a snapshot of the current state of BRS with highlights of both our accomplishments and challenges. We hope that you will find it helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill C. Duson".

Jill C. Duson,
Bureau Director

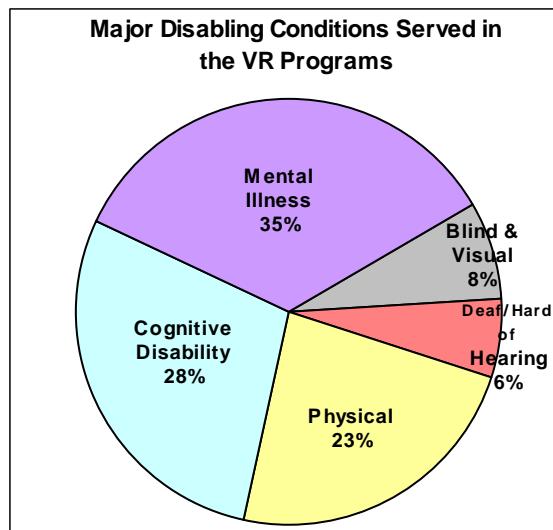
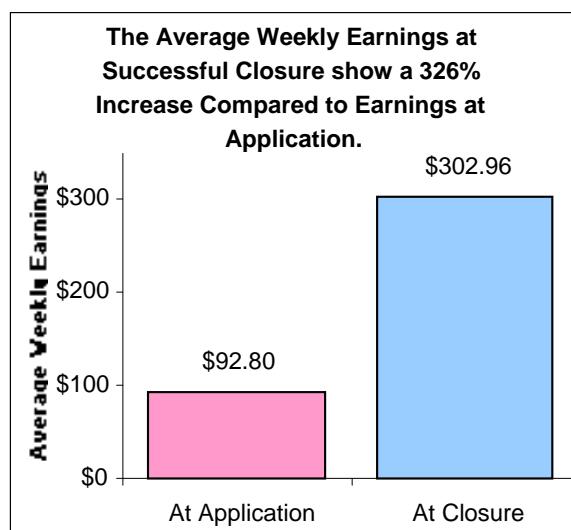
"The road to success is always under construction." Unknown

Introduction

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) SERVICES: The Rehabilitation Act, as amended in 1998, establishes program eligibility and the scope of VR services provided through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). Included are vocational counseling and guidance, physical restoration services, education and vocational skills training, and job placement services.

- In 2008, BRS assisted 11,826 Mainers with disabilities.
- 4,543 clients received services under an employment plan that was developed with a vocational rehabilitation counselor.
- Clients spend an average 43.2 months from application to closure receiving services under an employment plan.

In any given year, about half of the people who receive funded services through BRS become employed in community-based jobs. In 2008, 812 individual cases were closed successfully, with an average wage of \$303 per week.



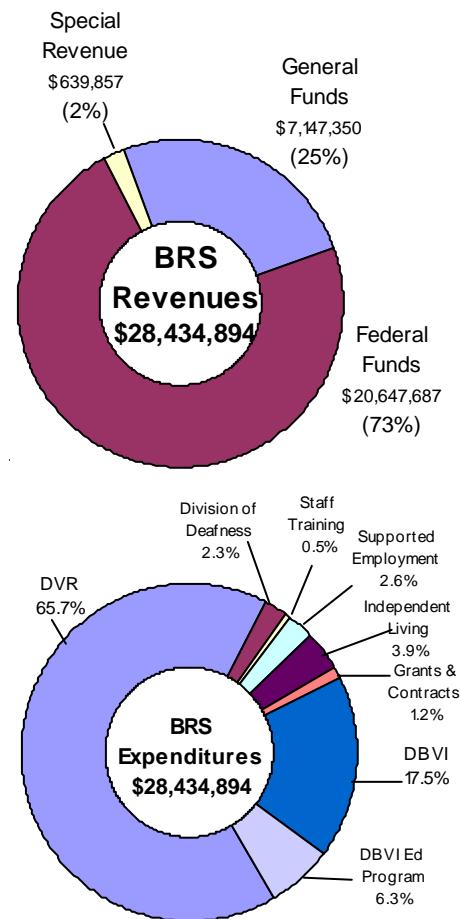
- Since 2002, the demand for services, particularly for the DVR program, has surpassed the available resources and resulted in a waiting list for services.

Revenues and Expenditures

The largest share of our federal funding comes from the Title I grant, which is matched with State funds (about 80% Federal to 20% State). The VR programs account for the greatest share of expenditures. In FFY 2008, the federal allocation to DVR was reduced by 1.6%; DBVI allocation was increased by about 1%.

Other federal grants are: State Independent Living Services, Independent Living-Older Blind, Supported Employment, Client Assistance Program, and In-Service Training. The expenditures for the Federal grants are legally restricted to purposes specified in the grant award agreements.

The Special Revenues are funded by resources such as the cafeteria and vending machine facilities managed by DBVI, and telecommunications and other local grants for the Division of Deafness. The Special Revenue fund is restricted to specific purposes.



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



"Contacting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is the best thing I ever did in terms of my adult working life. At one point or another, everyone in the local DVR office supported me in securing the professional position I now have."

-Hattie T.

Hattie T. is a great example of how Maine DVR assists people who become disabled following a workplace injury. With only a high school education, Hattie's initial work experiences were limited to factory and food service laborer jobs. After sustaining a significant back injury in a fall, she was unable to return to that type of work; and lacking any transferable work skills that would enable her to change to another career, she was unsure how she would be able to earn a living.

After an extended period of unemployment, Hattie was referred to DVR. Through career exploration activities, Hattie expressed interest in pursuing a career in criminal justice/social work. With diligence, Hattie embarked on and successfully completed a B.A. degree with a double major in Behavioral Science in Criminal Justice and Sociology at the University of Maine at Presque Isle. However, she was unable to find employment in the criminal justice field. With a strong desire and personal need to remain in Aroostook County, she realized the need to broaden her job search and remained persistent in pursuing all job leads that came her way. This eventually lead her to apply for a highly sought after accounting technician position with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) in Limestone, Maine.

Assisted by vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) Greg Anderson, who had direct experience with submitting documents to DFAS pertaining to the Federal Accepted Appointment Section, Hattie received a firm job offer from DFAS in February of 2007. *"Contacting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is the best thing I ever did in terms of my adult working life. At one point or another, everyone in the local DVR office supported me in securing the professional position I now have."*

Hattie has been successfully employed in her position ever since. She readily acknowledges that she has had no regrets about changing her career goal away from her interest in criminal justice to that of an accounting technician. Hattie says, "I would be hard pressed to perform my current work duties without the skills I obtained through my college education. Many, if not all, of the courses I completed in the Behavioral Science majors have direct relevance to what I do on a day-to-day basis in my current job. The DVR has my sincere appreciation for all of the support that was provided to me by everyone in the local office, both past and present."

DVR Programs

General Vocational Rehabilitation Services:

Individual counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, independent living, supported employment and more.

Independent Living Services:

Training for adaptive skills to provide alternatives to accomplishing daily tasks.

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**Maine's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** assists eligible individuals with disabilities who wish to achieve or retain employment in the community. Any individual who is committed to work and has a disability that creates a barrier to employment is encouraged to apply for assistance.

No two people's path to employment is exactly the same, and while VR services are federally mandated, the process allows for some flexibility to meet individual needs. Services begin with an application, eligibility determination, and a comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs. Counseling and guidance, the development of an individualized employment plan, and provision of services required for a specific employment goal then help people move to successful job placement.

Over the last two fiscal years DVR has increased its job placement rate by 8% in 2007 and by 5% in 2008, thus, achieving a major agency goal!

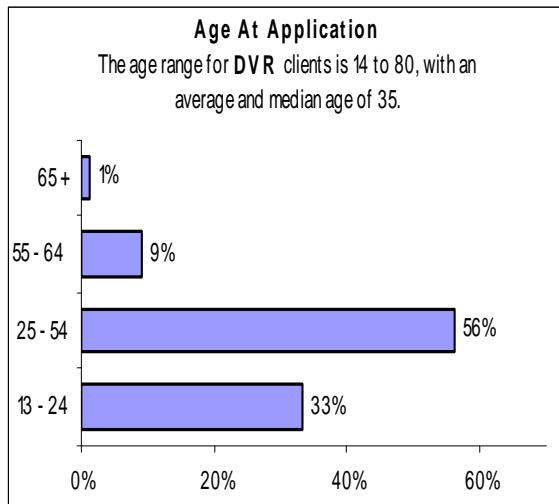
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DVR By The Numbers

Individuals Served in 2008

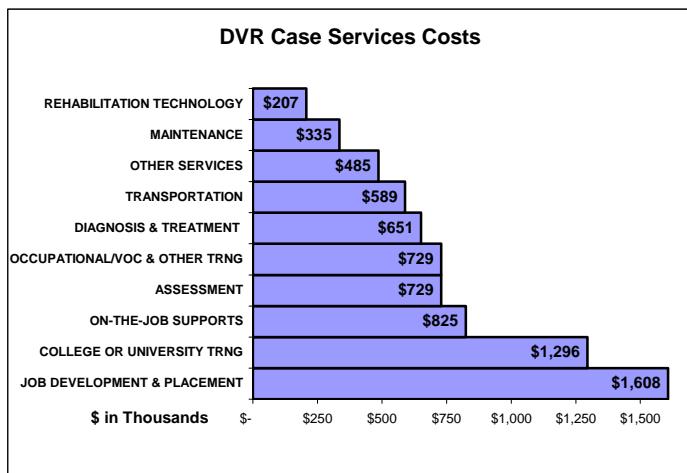
- 3,165 New Applicants
- 2,962 Found Eligible for Services
- 4,015 Receive Services through Employment Plans
- 730 Individuals Placed in Employment

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## Cost of Case Services

The Chart below shows DVR's FY 2008 Case Service Expenditures by the type of service provided. Job Development & Placement, College or University Training, and On-the-Job Supports were the top three service groups in terms of case costs, representing over 50% of all case service expenditures.

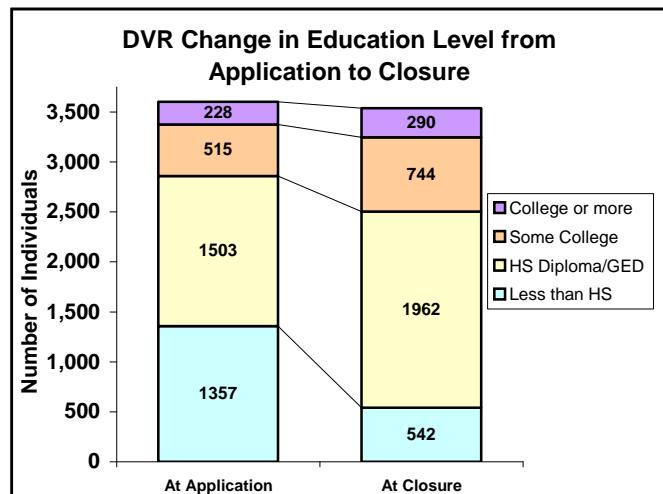


## Employment Outcomes

- \$97.44 – Average Weekly Wage at Application
- \$320.16 – Average Weekly Wage at Closure
- 329% – Increased Earning Capacity

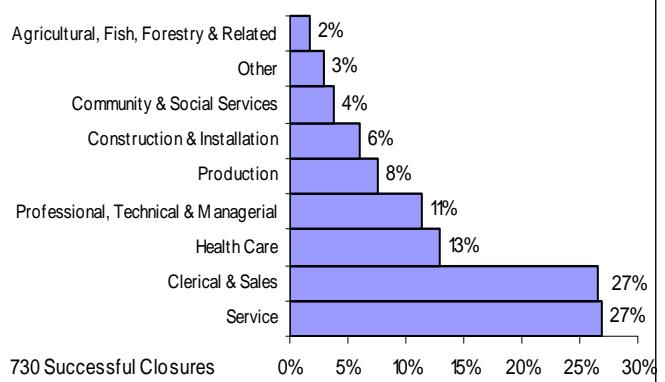
## Change in Education Level

The Chart below compares the education level of all FY 2008 closures from application. 356 individuals with a high school diploma or less at application increased their education level during participation in a VR program, and 291 people increased their education level to some college or more.



## DVR FY 2008 Occupation Groups

78% of Successful Closures found employment in Service, Clerical & Sales, Health Care or Professional, Technical & Managerial Occupations.



# Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired



*"After 24 years of doing this job, I don't know when I will retire, but it's not going to be today!"*

**- Sylvia G.**

Sylvia G. is a manager in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), which was developed under federal legislation enacted in 1936 called the Randolph-Sheppard Act. Sylvia's experience with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired goes back more than twenty years, and her tenure with the BEP goes back to March 1984. The following testimonial is in her own words:

"I was a stay at home Mom raising five kids. When they were all raised, I knew I needed something to do. So I went to the Division of Eye Care (now known as the Division f/t Blind & Visually Impaired) looking for some type of work. I found out about the Randolph Sheppard program. I was a little hesitant at first, but decided to go find out more. I went to the Maine Center for the Blind in Portland to be evaluated. Then, I went to a working snack bar there to see if I even wanted to do this kind of work. I realized I was more than interested. After being trained by people who were already working at some snack bars, I went into the Federal Building in Bangor. Boy was I nervous! But the people there were so accepting and encouraging, and with the help of my husband and family, and of course the help of the BEP staff, it didn't take me too long to get over it."

After about four years, the contract the post office had with Canteen ran out, and I was able to have vending machines there since they were in the Federal Building. In about 1992 the post office moved into a new building in Hampden, which is where I am working now. I operated both places for about two years, at which time I gave up the snack bar. I still love my job, but I miss all my friends at the Fed. Building I see a lot of them even now. We go out to dinner once a month with a bunch from Soc. Sec. The most valuable asset to all of us doing this type of job is your customer. My motto is they are always right even if sometimes you know they aren't. Don't worry; they know they aren't either, but that's part of working with people. After 24 years of doing this job I don't know when I will retire, but it's not going to be today!"

## DBVI Programs

### ***Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Working Aged Adults who are Blind or Visually Impaired:***

*Individual vocational counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, orientation and mobility instruction, low vision services, independent living services and more.*

***Business Enterprise Program:*** *Training and support to manage and operate snack bars, cafeterias, and vending machine facilities on state, federal and municipal properties.*

### ***Independent Living Services for Individuals who are Older and are Blind or have Visual Impairment:***

*Training in adaptive skills to provide alternative techniques for accomplishing daily tasks that enable the individual to be more independent and self-sufficient.*

***Education Services for Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired:*** *Adaptive instruction services to students in local schools related to academics and independence.*

**The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)** can provide many services to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Services may include individual counseling and guidance related to adjustment to blindness and employment issues, use of adaptive technology, training in low vision services, adaptive skill training in communication, orientation and mobility instruction to develop independent travel skills and learning how to interpret non-visual information in one's environment, and instruction of daily living skills geared to being more self-sufficient.

In 2008, in addition to providing VR services to 713 people seeking employment, the DBVI IL program has enabled more than 400 individuals who are older and blind to remain independent in their homes and communities. DBVI also provided 280 children who are blind or visually impaired with specialized educational services, such as instruction in reading and writing braille, use of adaptive technology, efficient use of one's remaining vision, adaptive skill training in communication, orientation and mobility to develop independent travel skills, daily living skills instruction leading toward self-sufficiency, and other types of services that assist students to access their education curriculum and prepare for life (including employment) after graduation. Most of these educational services are direct instructional services and technical assistance within their school system as part of their Individual Education Program (IEP).

# DBVI By The Numbers

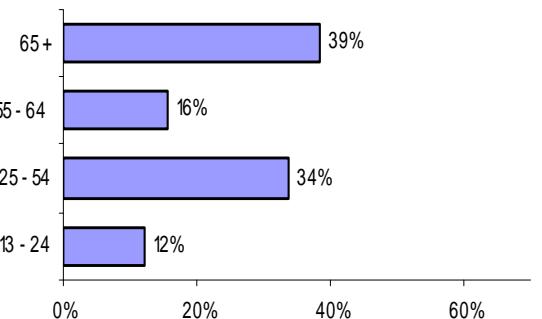
## Individuals Served in 2008

- 247 New Applicants
- 227 Found Eligible for Services
- 559 Services Provided through Employment Plans
- 82 Successful Outcomes

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Age At Application

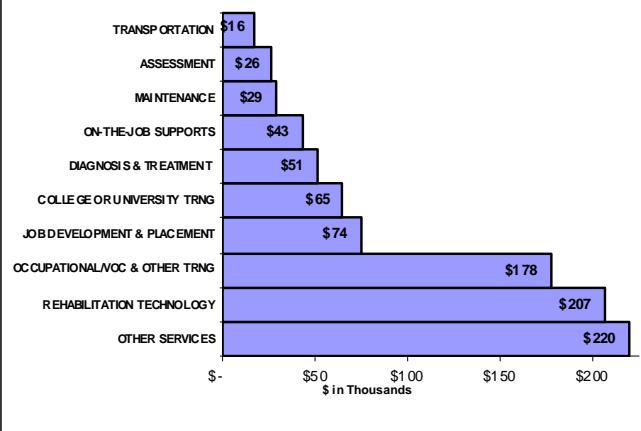
The age range for DBVI clients is 13 to 94, with an average age of 56 and median age of 57.



Cost of Case Services

The Chart below shows DBVI's FY 2008 Case Service Expenditures by the type of service provided. Rehabilitation Technology, Job Development & Placement, and On-the-Job Supports were top service groups in terms of case costs, representing 67% of all case service expenditures.

DBVI Case Services Costs



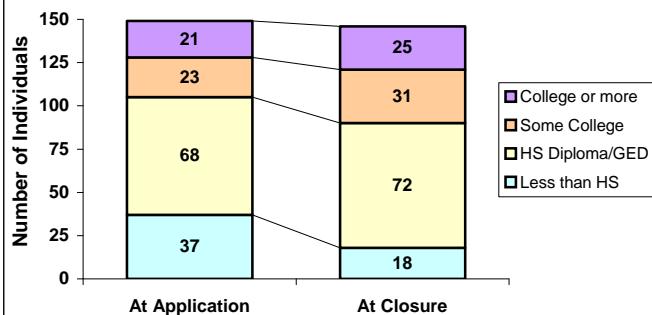
Employment Outcomes

- \$51.55 – Average Weekly Wage at Application
- \$149.80 – Average Weekly Wage at Closure
- 291% – Increased Earning Capacity

Change in Education Level

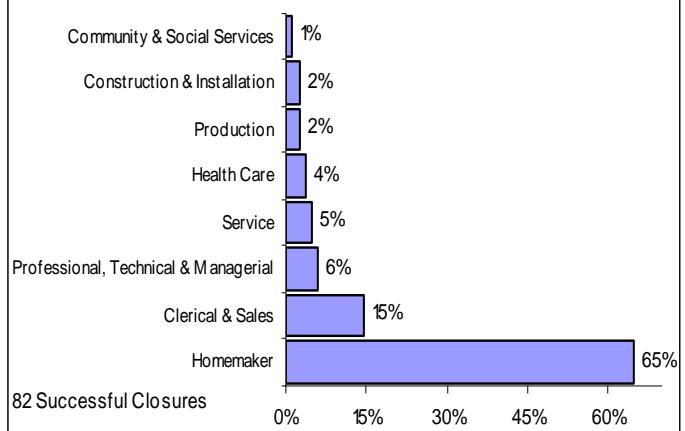
The Chart below compares the education level of all FY 2008 closures from application to closure. 15 individuals with a high school diploma or less at application increased their education level during participation in a VR program and 12 people increases in their education level to some college or more.

DBVI Change in Education Level from Application to Closure



DBVI FY 2008 Occupation Groups

65% of Successful Closures were Homemakers. Of the other Successful Closures, 72% found employment in the Clerical & Sales, Professional, Technical and Managerial or Service fields.



Division of Deafness



The Division of Deafness (DoD) was established by the legislature in 1982 to “provide advocacy for the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in the areas of employment, education, legal aid, health care, social services, finance, housing, and other personal assistance.”

As a part of its mission to serve over 100,000 of Maine’s Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late-deafened citizens, the DoD manages both the Telecommunications Equipment and the Civil Rights/Advocacy Programs administered through the Maine Center on Deafness. The Telecommunications Equipment Program

provides telecommunication equipment to all people with disabilities enabling their full access to all telephone services in the state. The Civil Rights / Advocacy Program provides individual and systemic advocacy services to people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or late deafened to ensure equitable access to opportunities and services. The Division also provides valuable assistance in the form of information/referral and advocacy. This past year the Division provided this direct service to 342 people.

In 2008, the DoD and its Advisory Council developed a Five-Year Plan based on past statewide needs assessments. This plan was formally adopted at the Advisory Council annual meeting in October 2008. The 12 focus areas of the plan include: services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing senior citizens, employment, enriched social opportunities, access to public safety and the judicial system, leadership and advocacy, public and state accessibility, education, mental health services, services for people who are Deaf and visually impaired, parent and family support, and services for persons who are Deaf and have a developmental disability. The goal of this plan is to “Ensure That Maine Citizens Who are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or Late Deafened Have Equal Access to Participate In All Activities and Opportunities of Employment, Recreation, Government, State and Community Services.” To access a copy of the Council’s Five-Year Plan, connect to the Division of Deafness web site at www.maine.gov/rehab/dod.

This past year, the Division played an active role in the passing of legislation to revise the definition of service animal, as well as administering a legislatively authorized assessment of the need for hearing aids for low-income elders. This assessment and recommendations can be accessed through the above web site. A statewide achievement this past year involved the Department of Labor, Department of Human Services, and the Information Technology staff from the Department of Administrative and Financial Services in the installation of videophones for State employees who are Deaf and State service providers who are American Sign Language fluent.

The Office of the State Accessibility Coordinator

The office of the state **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** Accessibility Coordinator was created by Executive Order in 2003 and is housed in the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. The Coordinator works with all departments and their coordinators to ensure compliance with State and federal disability rights laws, including the ADA, Section 504, and the Maine Human Rights Act. The office provides training and technical assistance, reviews ADA compliance plans, responds to complaints from individuals, and maintains a list of accessible conference and meeting facilities.

- The Coordinator led the State's adoption, through a public rulemaking, of the "Non-discrimination Policy and Grievance Procedure" (12-168 Ch. 50), re-establishing a formal complaint process and policy to protect individuals with disabilities.
- Bureau staff work with the IT Accessibility Committee advising the Chief Information Officer, who adopted the "Accessibility Policy on Effective Electronic Communications" and "Standards and Best Practices" to provide guidance so people with disabilities receive information in accessible formats.
- The Department led all State agencies to designate ADA coordinators and convened an introductory workshop about responsibilities.
- The Coordinator worked with the Departments of Transportation and Conservation on review of accessibility at the Penobscot Narrows Bridge and Observatory and to implement audio interpretive materials.
- To create consistency in State laws, the Coordinator and Division of Deafness brought together affected State agencies and consumer organizations to recommend to the 123rd Legislature revisions in the definition of "service dog," which were adopted, establishing a method for City Clerks to certify a service dog for licensing.

Challenges

Training and Resources: Continue to build training programs throughout State offices, using web-based documents, distance learning, and live workshops. Develop resource materials easily usable by all State employees.

Coordinator Network: Distribute periodic update newsletters and reconvene the Departmental coordinators.

Communication Access: Develop capacity for live captioning and remote interpreting for Deaf consumers using State programs and services. Implement public videophone stations in State facilities. Continue improvement of Maine.gov web sites and services.

Employment: In conjunction with Disability Program Navigators, improve assistive technologies and service-delivery through the CareerCenter system. Implement programs with business partners to encourage employment of persons with disabilities.



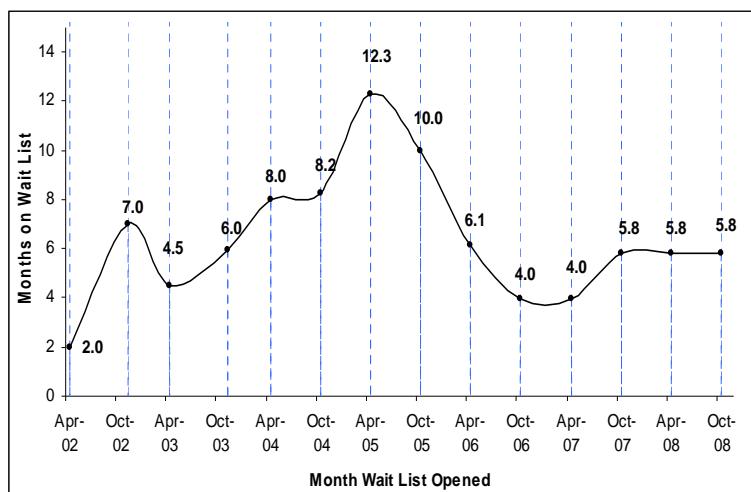
Challenges Before Us

Unmet Needs, Goals and Priorities

Given the national and state fiscal crisis in 2008, BRS has had to focus on ways to more effectively manage limited resources, while allowing for individualized approaches that result in successful outcomes for people in need of vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. All three Divisions develop annual plans that incorporate assessments of unmet needs into goals and priorities for the upcoming year.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation: In 2008, DVR worked with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in completing its triennial onsite monitoring report. The review by the RSA evaluated the performance of DVR in the following areas: employment outcomes; time an individual spends in the vocational rehabilitation process; staff credentials; and fiscal management. Findings and observations by RSA included the need to address significant delays in the development of individual plans for employment; prioritizing who is served first; reducing the large numbers of consumers who drop out of the program; evaluating services provided by community rehabilitation providers; effectively assisting students who are entering adulthood; and strengthening staff caseload management skills.

Ensuring the availability of services remains a huge challenge to DVR. Service demand and costs continue to rise while funding has not. Significant effort has been made by staff to move individuals off the waiting list into an active case status over the last few years, but DVR has been unable to achieve its ultimate goal of eliminating the wait for services.



The chart at left reflects the actual waiting period for DVR services through October 2008. At one point in 2005, the DVR wait period grew to over twelve months and has now leveled off at 5.8 months. By regulation, VR agencies cannot expend resources for individuals on a wait list, except to provide information and referral, and secure certain medical evaluations.

The recruitment, retention, and availability of qualified rehabilitation counselors is another significant challenge to daily operations and staff turnover has resulted in

consumers being transferred from counselor-to-counselor reducing consumer satisfaction in service delivery. Lastly, DVR has an aging workforce.

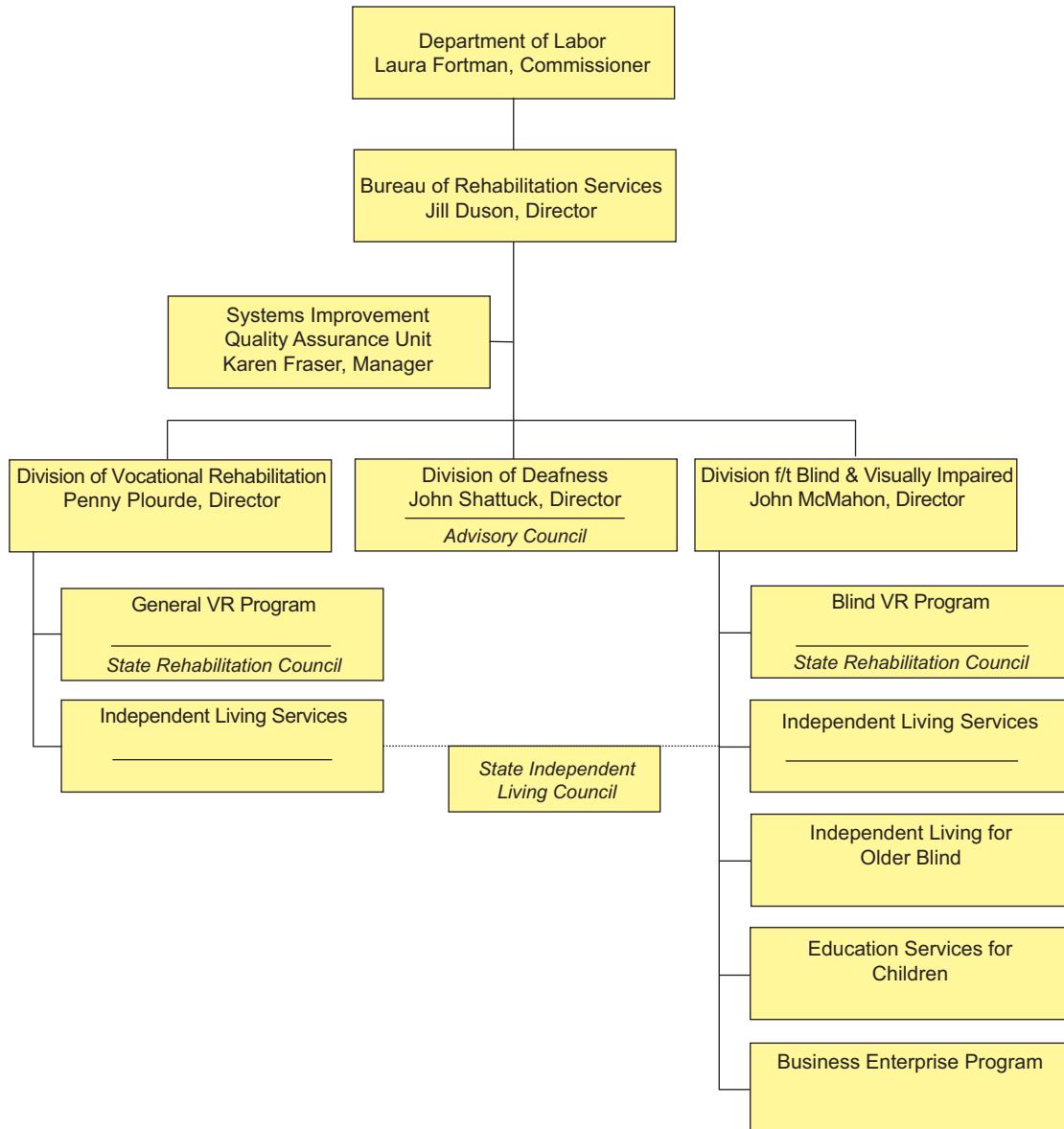
Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired: In 2008, **DBVI** conducted a statewide assessment that identified unmet needs for individuals who are blind or have low vision, which included information, resources and training in assistive technology, adequate transportation, increased awareness of community programs and services, and increased competitive employment opportunities. DBVI has established these 'needs' as priority activities, in addition to developing and implementing a 'financial enhancement' initiative for persons who are older and blind and who receive homemaker or independent living services. This effort will increase the number of clients of the agency who enter jobs in the competitive labor market. DBVI also is developing initiatives that support students transitioning from school to the world of work or post-secondary training. DBVI measures consumer satisfaction as a primary strategy for improving service delivery.

Division of Deafness: During 2008, staff of the **DoD** and members of its Advisory Council established a five-year plan based upon past statewide needs assessments. The plan is a comprehensive and ambitious effort to influence a broad array of disciplines, interests and unique populations, while preserving the integrity of the Division and the Council's basic values of inclusion, collaboration, leadership and empowerment. In 2009, DoD will begin to implement time-defined strategies that will bring improvement to the overall range and depth of services and opportunities, which to date have not been fully available to the Deaf, hard-of-hearing and late deafened citizens of Maine.



Organizational Structure

140 Staff deliver statewide public vocational rehabilitation services and independent living services through three primary divisions.



Office Locations and Phone Numbers

BRS Office Directory

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)

Augusta

2 Enterprise Drive, Suite 2
Augusta, ME 04333-0073
624-5120 or 1-800-760-1573
TTY: 1-800-633-0770
Fax: 287-6249

Bangor

45 Oak Street, Suite 1
Bangor, ME 04401-6664
561-4000 or 1-888-545-8811
TTY: 1-800-498-6711
Fax: 561-4027

Houlton (DVR only)

91 Military Street, Suite 3
Houlton, ME 04730-2421
532-5300 or 1-800-691-0033
TTY: 1-888-697-2897
Fax: 532-5309

Lewiston

5 Mollison Way
Lewiston, ME 04240-5805
753-9000 or 1-800-741-2991
TTY: 1-877-796-9833
Fax: 753-9051

Machias (DVR only)

15 Prescott Drive, Suite 2
Machias, ME 04654-9751
255-1926 or 1-800-770-7774
TTY: 1-800-381-9932
Fax: 255-3091

Portland

185 Lancaster Street
Portland, ME 04101-2453
771-5627 or 1-800-315-1192
TTY: 1-800-770-7774
Fax: 775-7870

Presque Isle

66 Spruce Street, Suite 3
Presque Isle, ME 04769-3222
760-6300 or 1-800-635-0357
TTY: 1-888-697-2877
Fax: 760-6300

Rockland

91 Camden Street, Suite 202
Rockland, ME 04841-2421
596-2641 or 1-877-421-7916
TTY: 1-888-212-6229
Fax: 594-1858

Skowhegan (DVR only)

98 North Avenue, Suite 16
Skowhegan, ME 04976-1923
474-4958 or 1-800-760-1572
TTY: 1-888-697-2912
Fax: 474-4914

Central Administrative Office

150 State House Station
Augusta 04333-0150
1-800-698-4440
TTY: 1-800-749-5356
Fax: 287-5292